

Alliance of National Heritage Areas signs Memorandum of Understanding with French Federation of Regional Nature Parks

On June 19, 2007 the Alliance of National Heritage Areas entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Federation de Parcs Naturels Regionaux, a system of forty-five regional nature parks in France. The agreement outlines the common activities and goals of the two organizations, in an effort to promote mutual understanding as well as the sharing of best practices and technical expertise across international boundaries. The official signing ceremony occurred as part of the International Heritage Development Conference (IHDC), a four day symposium sponsored by the Alliance and hosted this year by the Motorcities National Heritage Area in Detroit.



The MOU builds on more than two years of exchange and dialogue between the Federation and the Alliance. In 2006, delegates from three national heritage areas toured two regional nature parks in France, with the aim of not only building relationships, but also of gaining new expertise in the areas of conservation and sustainable economic development. French regional nature parks share many similarities with the National Heritage Areas, including a commitment to improving regional quality of life through the protection of nationally significant landscapes and culture traditions.

In addition to ratifying the agreement, delegates from the French Federation also participated in IHDC programming. Serge Menicucci, past director of the Verdon Park, and Dominique Leveque, current director of the Montagne de Reims Park, both presented on the history, goals and challenges of sustainable development in France, while Jacques Decugniere, past director of the Luberon Park, and Jean-Luc Beghin, current director of a three park coalition in the north of France, offered insights into the day-to-day challenges of both conserving and promoting unique natural and cultural resources. Also in attendance at the conference was Luc Coppin, the director of the Scarpe-Escaut Park in the north of France.

Following their time in Detroit, the French delegates traveled to Pennsylvania to visit three national heritage areas - the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area, the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley National Heritage Area. During their three-day tour, the visitors were exposed to a wide array of sites, projects and programming. In Pottstown, delegates learned about an exciting educational partnership between a local community college and the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area, while in Wilkes-Barre they

visited an ongoing levee construction project, which includes the creation of a regional trail system supported by the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. In Scranton, the delegates had the opportunity to visit with elected officials to learn about the impact of programming undertaken by the Lackawanna Heritage Valley National Heritage Area. This includes partnerships with local museums and historical societies as well as the support of preservation-minded economic development initiatives.

After completing the tour, the French delegates and National Heritage Areas staff pledged to continue their partnership with ongoing technical exchange. In October of this year, an American delegation representing the Alliance will travel to the Loire Valley region of France to participate in a companion signing ceremony to the Detroit event. It is hoped that the MOU will lead to new and exciting dialogue in the field of Heritage Development, including the potential for individual partnerships between Regional Nature Parks in France and National Heritage Areas in the United States.

